



Group A Streptococcal Infections **Frequently Asked Questions**

Overview

Group A β -hemolytic streptococcus (Group A strep) is a bacterium that is responsible for a variety of health problems. Group A strep usually causes throat infections (strep throat) or mild skin infections (impetigo). However, sometimes it can cause severe or life-threatening conditions such as rheumatic fever, toxic shock syndrome, or necrotizing fasciitis (commonly known as flesh eating disease).

How does Group A strep spread to others?

You can get a group A strep throat infection by direct contact with saliva or nasal drainage from an infected person. You can get a group A strep skin infection by touching areas of infected skin. Most people do not get group A strep infections from casual contact from others. Crowded environments like dormitories, school, or an institutional setting such as a nursing home can make it easier for the bacteria to spread. After 24 hours of antibiotic treatment, infected people will no longer spread the germs to others.

Preventing Group A strep infections

Ways to avoid infection include good handwashing practices and avoiding contact with other people's saliva and nasal drainage. It is important for healthcare workers to follow standard precautions and hand hygiene guidelines with all patients.

Skin Infections: Impetigo, Cellulitis, Erysipelas

What is impetigo?

Impetigo is an infection of the top layers of the skin. It is most common among children ages 2 to 6 years. It usually starts when the bacteria get into a cut, scratch, or insect bite. Impetigo is usually caused by group A streptococcus, but can also be caused by staphylococcus, a different bacterium. Impetigo is spread by direct contact with wounds, sores, or nasal drainage from an infected person.

What is cellulitis and erysipelas?

Cellulitis is an infection of the skin and deep underlying tissues. Erysipelas is a special name for the rapidly spreading cellulites that can sometimes occur with Group A strep infections. Cellulitis and erysipelas can develop when the skin is injured, such as a burn, a minor cut, surgery or even chicken pox. If Group A strep gets into the injured skin, cellulitis or erysipelas can develop.

Severe Strep Infections

What are the most severe streptococcal infections?

Some types of group A strep bacteria cause severe infections. These include:

- Bacteremia (blood stream Infection)
- Toxic Shock Syndrome
- Necrotizing Fasciitis (Flesh-Eating Disease)

All severe group A strep infections may lead to shock, organ failure and death. Health care providers are trained to recognize and treat such infections quickly.

What are the early signs and symptoms of necrotizing fasciitis and streptococcal toxic shock syndrome?

Early signs and symptoms of necrotizing fasciitis:

- Fever
- Severe pain and swelling
- Redness at the wound site

Early signs and symptoms of Strep Toxic Shock Syndrome (STSS)

- Fever
- Dizziness
- Confusion

Who is at greatest risk for severe infection?

- Children with chickenpox
- People with suppressed immune systems
- Burn victims
- Elderly people with cellulites, diabetes, blood vessel disease, or cancer
- People taking steroid treatments or chemotherapy
- Intravenous drug users

Severe group A strep disease may also occur in healthy people with no known risk factors.

How common is invasive group A streptococcal disease?

Fortunately, serious invasive Group A strep infections are infrequent. About 9,400 cases occurred in the United States in 1999. Of these, about 300 were toxic shock syndrome and 600 were necrotizing fasciitis. In contrast, there are several million cases of strep throat and impetigo each year.

For more information, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website at:

http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/groupastreptococcal_g.htm